

Being a co-worker or a manager to a person returning to work after stroke: A challenge facilitated by cooperation and flexibility

Annika Öst Nilsson^{1,2}, Gunilla Eriksson^{1,3}, Eric Asaba¹, Ulla Johansson^{1,2}, Therese Hellman⁴

¹Department of Neurobiology, Care Sciences and Society, Division of Occupational Therapy, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden, ²Centre for Research & Development, Uppsala University/Region Gävleborg, Gävle, Sweden, ³Department of Neuroscience, Rehabilitation Medicine, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, ⁴Department of Medical Sciences, Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Introduction: Several actors are involved in the process of return to work (RTW) after stroke. Co-workers and managers are some of the key players in this process during work trial at the workplace.

Objectives: To explore and describe how co-workers and managers experience the RTW process involving a colleague with stroke, participating in a person-centred rehabilitation programme focusing on RTW.

Method: Seven co-workers and four managers were interviewed during the early process of RTW of a colleague with stroke. Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted and analysed using a grounded theory approach.

Results: The experience of providing support to the colleague in the RTW process was expressed as a balancing act dealing with one's own insecurity and lack of knowledge. Frustration and worries were expressed as well as a need for new strategies to be able to provide support, and the coordinator played an important role in this respect. The challenge of being a co-worker or a manager during the RTW process is described in three categories: *the emotional challenge of being a supportive co-worker or manager, the challenging experience of having too much responsibility, and being supportive despite lack of knowledge.*

Conclusion: This study contributes with new knowledge regarding the demanding role of being a co-worker or a manager to a colleague with stroke during the actual work trial. The role is challenging, which involves handling various practical and emotional obstacles. Close cooperation at the workplace is highly recommended, where the support of someone knowledgeable can be of great importance.